



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ninth Circuit Judicial Council Approves Jury Recommendations

SAN FRANCISCO – The Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit, governing body for federal courts in nine western states and two Pacific Island jurisdictions, has accepted the recommendations of a special circuit committee studying ways to improve the experience of citizens called for federal jury service. In other business, the council also approved a plan to ensure the ongoing participation of its largest judicial district in circuit governance.

The recommendations from the Jury Trial Improvement Committee, received by the council at its October 26 meeting in San Francisco, focus on enriching the juror experience before, during and after trial. They include better management of jury pools; more effective use of jurors' time; improved *voir dire*, the process used to select jurors for trial; improving juror comprehension; and addressing personal concerns jurors may have during jury service.

“Under our Constitution, jurors are very important to the judicial process. We want to make sure they are treated appropriately and with respect,” said Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Mary M. Schroeder of Phoenix in announcing the council action.

Notable among the recommendations pertaining to juror comprehension are ones allowing jurors to take notes and receive preliminary and final jury instructions in written form. In civil trials, jurors also could submit written questions to the bench and discuss evidence as the trial progresses. The committee recommended providing more and better information about the trial and judicial process to jurors at the beginning of *voir dire*, and to allow attorneys to conduct supplemental *voir dire* after the court's questioning is completed.

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To more effectively use jurors' time, the committee recommended setting time limits in civil cases, communicating to jurors about the estimated length of a trial, and considering jurors' needs in setting jury schedules. Also recommended was greater use of pretrial conferences to maximize use of jurors' time and streamline the trial.

Among federal courts, the Ninth Circuit is a leader in considering how to improve the juror experience. Its Jury Trial Improvement Committee, chaired by District Judge Susan Bolton of Phoenix, has been at work since 2002. Council endorsement of the committee's recommendations is expected to encourage district courts within the circuit to undertake the changes.

In other business, the judicial council considered proposals to restructure its membership so that the Central District of California, the largest judicial district in the circuit, will be continually represented. The Central District, whose district and bankruptcy courts are among the busiest in the nation, was not continually represented under current membership policies.

"This is an important change, which ensures the participation of our largest district in the governance of the circuit," Chief Judge Schroeder observed.

The Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit includes active and senior circuit judges and district judges, plus non-voting bankruptcy and magistrate judges. The council, which meets quarterly, is looked upon as a judicial board of directors, responsible by statute for the "effective and expeditious administration of justice" within the circuit.

The United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit consists of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and the district and bankruptcy courts and related court units for the Districts of Alaska, Arizona, Northern California, Central California, Eastern California, Southern California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Eastern Washington, Western Washington, the U.S. Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

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